Jap Evacuee Probe Spreads 'Untruths', WRA Head Claims

T-14 2-7-43

By WILLARD EDWARDS

Seething under a fire of criticism for his handling of the Japanese evacuee problem, Dillon S. Myer, director of the War Relocation Authority, yesterday struck back at the Costello Investigating Committee with the charge that its inquiry has given "nation-wide currency to many distortions and downright untruths which may lead to further maltreatment of our citizens who are prisoners in Japan."

Committee members, headed by Chairman John M. Costello (D.), of California, countered with the accusation that Myer had proposed censorship of testimony. They defended the accuracy of evidence gathered by committee investigators.

Expresses His Ire

Myer was summoned as one of the final witnesses at the hearings which have been conducted for the last eight weeks in California and Washington. He came prepared with a sizzling statement in which he released his ire over press accounts of the committee's investigation.

"The program of the WRA has been under investigation in such a manner as to achieve maximum publicity of sensational statements based on half-truths, exaggerations, and falsehood," he declared. "Statements of witnesses have been released to the public without verification of their accuracy, thus giving nation-wide currency to many distortions and downright untruths.

"This practice has fostered a public feeling of mistrust, suspicion and hatred that has had the effect of providing the enemy with material which can be used to convince the peoples of the Orient that the United States is undemocratic and is fighting a racial war.

"Unity Undermined"

"It has undermined the unity of the American people. It has further had the effect of betraying the democratic objectives which this nation and its allies are fighting to preserve. It may lead to further maltreatment of our citizens who are prisoners or who are interned."

"Aren't you criticizing the committee because we didn't exclude the press from the hearings?" asked Representative Karl Mundt (R.), of South Dakota. "Didn't you try to have the hearings held in secret?"

"We have never tried to censor the press," replied Myer. "We did offer our services to check the testimony of witnesses before they were released to the press."

A telegram from Myer to Chairman Costello, dated June 7, was put into the record. It suggested that to guard against "garbled statements," a WRA representative check upon the testimony of witnesses before it was released to the press.

"The fact is that you wanted to censor any news releases," commented Costello.

The chairman went on to assert that "the indiscriminate release of evacuees from relacation centers can have far more serious results than the stories you are complaining about."

"Hysterical Letters"

When Myer complained about committee evidence that the 96,000 evacuees in relocation centers are fed equally as well or better than American civilians, Costello remarked:

"I don't see how stories that Japs are pampered in camps here are going to hurt American prisoners in Japan."

"It stirs up feeling which may result in harm done to Japanese-Americans in this country," insisted Myer. "And that might lead to punishment of our men in Japanese hands. We have been receiving a flood of hysterical letters since this investigation started."

Release Slowed Down

Myer said there were 96,237 Japs remaining in the 10 relocation centers, 15,306 having been released. The committee's investigation and the publicity given it has slowed down release of evacuees, he noted regretfully, only 356 having been released last week.

"It is our policy to release as many as possible in the shortest possible time," he testified. "It is a bad thing to bring up 25,000 or 30,000 youngsters under camp conditions. We're developing a delinquency problem and serious damage will be done if it keeps up.

"Up to date, not one incident of disloyalty of any type has been brought to light in the case of a released evacuee."

Earlier, the committee was aroused by the assertion of Mike Masaoka, formerly Washington lobbyist for the Japanese American Citizens League, that military rule might create "more bloodshed" in the relocation centers.

Masaoka, inducted into the Army June 4, insisted that transfer of the camps from the WRA regime to Army control, would create a "regimentation" which would lead to disorder.